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TIDINGS

Volume 87, Number 1, January, 2024

UNDERSTANDING *ANXIETY*

Anxiety may not feel good, but it helps if we
remember it is not supposed to because it has a
powerful purpose.

Building faith in the
Christadelphian community.

TIDINGS

Volume 87, Number 1 / January, 2024



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E D I T O R I A L



IS CHRIST DIVIDED?

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.

Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

1st Corinthians 1:10-13

I begin this editorial with an apology. When I became Editor of the *Tidings* in 2020, I intended to make the *Tidings* a place of refuge. Readers come here not looking for controversy or upset but for encouragement in a world that is already difficult to live in. Surely, we made some mistakes in the past three years, and we may have troubled you with what we said in an article. Please know it was not intentional. We value all brothers and sisters, regardless of whether their point of view matches ours. We also acknowledge that we aren't always correct, which might be an understatement!

But I write this editorial with exasperation in my heart. It isn't aimed at any one person or any particular event. It is aimed at all of us, me included. We have tolerated, for nearly 125 years, division in our community. I've previously tiptoed around the need for unity and trust in past editorials. I didn't want to offend. But this month, I want to be more direct.

It is really quite inexcusable that we still find ourselves divided or estranged

in our fellowship. I won't comment on the reasons for this or the potential solutions. But I am beginning to think that maybe we just don't assign the proper value to unity as a first principle. We tolerate behaviors that we should condemn. We allow words and actions to reflect a secular vernacular, not the spirit of Christ.

As a young brother, I held a naïve level of certainty that we would have worked out our differences by now. Our entire community is one of the rarest on earth. We are aligned on the fundamentals of Scripture. Please don't let anyone

tell you differently. Those engaged in unity discussions today share the same hope of Israel.

I need not tell you what we are losing every day over division. It ruptures households. It denies access to loved ones. It weakens our outreach. It sours our

young people. It fails to give honor to our Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone loses. Everyone.

Paul spent a good chunk of his ministry in Corinth. It began with his frustrating reception in the Jewish synagogue

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but eventually gained significant momentum. I believe Corinth became the largest of the ecclesias in Paul's time. The ecclesia was an amalgam of Jews and Gentiles. The city was fully immersed in idol worship and pagan behaviors. Many of Paul's strongest allies in the Truth worked there—Apollos, Peter, Gaius, Priscilla and Aquilla, Silas, and Timothy, each attempting to teach and reinforce sound doctrine. It was an immensely important ecclesia in the first century.

Paul began his first letter by diving right into the biggest problem the ecclesia was facing: division. He later addressed many other issues that Corinth underwent, both behavioral and doctrinal, but this one was uppermost on his mind. Issues like ecclesial discipline, the judgment of others, fornication, and adultery, and idolatry were not selected as the most pressing issues. Division was.

Paul noted there had been reports of “contentions” (ESV “quarreling”) within the ecclesia. Later, Paul adds:

For you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world? (1 Cor 3:3 NLT).

A huge part of why brothers and sisters can't achieve unity is for this reason. We migrate from being people of the spirit of Christ to acting “*like people of the world.*” We revert to what feels comfortable to the flesh but is opposed to the Spirit. We hear “us and them” statements that place others in a bad light, often devoid of facts. We certainly are not on the right track when we indict or denigrate a brother or sister in Christ, and we should not tolerate this behavior when it happens.

In Corinth, members were identifying themselves with human leaders. This stance is common for people to adopt. We often are impressed with the charisma or leadership some show, but sometimes they lead us away from truth, not to it. The Corinthians no doubt placed a value on whose “camp” they were in. But there is zero benefit in alignment with any other than the Lord Jesus Christ. None of these impressive men in Corinth had died for them. Brothers and sisters weren't baptized into their names. The only alignment of believers is to be in Jesus Christ. We would do well to make this our only identification today.

I am sure you, too, have reached the end of your patience with our separations. Brethren on other continents watch us with great sadness as they see North Americans continuing to be laden with

this stain. The *Tidings* proposes that we all make unity a top priority in 2024. If you are in an ecclesia that is talking with others to achieve unity, please continue. If you aren't, please start. None of us knows how to make this all work, but the LORD does. Our LORD God provided Daniel with the ability to be a "*dissolver of knots*."¹ (Dan 5:12). It wasn't from his own capabilities but by what was revealed to him by the King of Heaven. We seem to have a few knots that need dissolving.

Here's how we might get there. It begins with a community-wide commitment to prayer on this issue. Pray for it in your own home. Make your petitions as an ecclesia. Let's pray for unity at gatherings and Bible Schools. Let us all ask our Heavenly Father to show us how to dissolve the knots. On the way, let's not tolerate but rebuke any behavior inconsistent with that goal. Let's speak highly of one another, regardless of the other's current point of view.

We know that our Almighty God wants us to be one. We know that the first principles are an essential part of fellowship and important to get right. Further, we know that only our God knows the pathway to accomplish reconciliation. Only our God knows what is in a man's heart. Let's stop relying on our own capabilities and trust in Him. Let's ask Him to direct us as we offer earnest and ongoing prayers. Let's seek to build trust and understanding and break down barriers of communication and distrust.

One hundred and twenty-five years is enough! Let's get together as a community without anyone stopping us from this pursuit. We deserve better. The Lord Jesus, who prayed, "*That they all may be one*" (John 17:21), deserves better.

My love to you all in 2024. May our gracious heavenly Father bring us all together this year.

Dave Jennings

1. The KJV Oxford margin offers this alternative—"*dissolver of knots*" rather than "*dissolver of doubts*."

Mom's Initiative

Calling All Moms!

Nancy Brinkerhoff, Denver Ecclesia, CO
and Linda Beckerson, Ann Arbor Ecclesia, MI

The *Tidings* wants to help our community better understand the needs of families raising children of all ages today. What kinds of support are today's moms getting? What kinds of support might moms be looking for? How can ecclesias, or organizations like the *Tidings*, better provide needed resources?

We have created a survey for moms to share their feedback. This anonymous survey will be compiled to look at overall trends only.

If you are currently a mom raising kids, please follow the link below to take the survey before it **closes on February 15**. And please share it with all the Christadelphian moms you know. The more we learn from each other, the better we can support the next generation of families!

Here's the link:

www.mytidings.org/csm

CORRECTION

We had many uplifting comments about Bro. Ken Sommerville's article in the November issue, "*We All Love Bible*

Schools." We do acknowledge an error of identification in one of the photos.

The three brethren shown here are Eric Mansfield, H.P. Mansfield, and Peter Mansfield. We thank Bro. Paul Wade (Houston West Ecclesia, TX) for reporting this. Bro. Paul remembers taking this picture many years ago.



RETIREMENT NOTICES

IN Christ, we are all called to service in one form or another. As interest in the *Tidings* Magazine continued to grow, it created a need for a service committee to be established

in 1991 to help with the work. Since then, many brothers and sisters have shared in the effort. We are announcing the retirement of three of our longstanding committee members, and we would like to thank each of them and their spouses for their dedicated service to the community. They have been instrumental in helping to build the faith of brothers, sisters, and young people through the magazine's pages. While we could write much about their contributions, we are making special note of one significant contribution of each.

Bro. Ken Sommerville

First, we thank Bro. Ken Sommerville (Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA) for his thirty-two years of service as one of



Bonnie and Ken Sommerville

the founding members of the Committee. Bro. Ken was officially a committee member, but his wife, Sis. Bonnie has also made a significant contributions as well. Bro. Ken and Sis.

Bonnie have been selfless workers in the faith for many years and on many other committees. We are truly grateful for Bro Ken's wise counsel. He has always helped bring a spiritual perspective to various *Tidings* decisions and directions over the years, including how to deal with some very challenging topics. His contribution of numerous articles and work on special issues has also given refreshment and spiritual benefit to our readers. Bro. Ken's dependable and spiritually balanced perspective was instrumental in helping achieve unity on the North American West Coast. The success of that unity continues to this day and contains the elements needed to help bring about unity for the rest of the continent. While Bro. Ken's regular counsel as a committee

member ends at the end of this year; we rest in knowing he is only a phone call away if help is needed. Thank you again, Bro. Ken and Sis. Bonnie.

Bro. Joe Hill

Bro. Joe Hill (Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX) will be retiring from the Committee after twenty-seven and half years of service. Bro. Joe leveraged his detailed knowledge of Scripture in numerous articles and reviews of articles. Bro. Joe and his wife, Sis. Kathy, together took on multiple roles on the committee. Many know Bro. Joe was my predecessor when he served as Chairman of the *Tidings* for 13 years. You may not know that he, along with tremendous help and dedication from Sis. Kathy also simultaneously acted as Publisher and handled financial matters, which is no trivial task. Bro. Joe and Sis. Kathy literally saved the *Tidings* from near collapse a decade

ago when the *Tidings* suddenly lost our contracted printer and distributor quite abruptly. Finding a new printer quickly and putting a new distribution process in place was no small feat. Publishing the Editor's content involves taking the rich written work and transforming it into one of high appeal to read. Magazines in Christadelphia are highly subsidized by additional donations that subscription costs do not cover. Their outreach work greatly helped bring awareness that such donations were needed, and in turn, we have been blessed by the community's generosity. We refer you to more on their work of service found in the Jan 2020 Issue of the *Tidings* (tidings.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2021-01-Jan-v2.pdf). Thank you again, Bro. Joe and Sis. Kathy.

Bro. Kevin Flatley

Bro. Kevin Flatley (Pittsburgh Ecclesia, PA) is retiring after twelve years of service. His steady hand in chairing and facilitating Committee meetings has been a tremendous contribution to the Committee and other meetings within the community. The value of this particular skill is woefully undervalued among many; however, we have seen its true value. I would encourage Bro. Kevin to author a guidance document for others on effectively chairing a meeting. This project would greatly benefit Arranging



Kathy and Joe Hill

Boards and various other committees in the community. His facilitation skills were complimented by his balanced understanding of the application of Scripture to help the Committee address sensitive and important topics. Bro. Kevin, along with Sis. Melinda has contributed greatly to the review of articles, including content, accuracy, and readability. Their combined awareness of the community's needs has been appreciated, as they have consistently shared their insights in the spirit of humility as servants of Christ. Thank you again, Bro. Kevin. Thankfully, Sis. Melinda will continue working closely with our Editor on editing and proofing of *Tidings* content.

In a separate letter to each of those retiring, I noted that Scripture does not speak of retirement as we understand it today. The word, or even concept, is really only found when speaking of the priests, who had been bearing

a significant physical load in their priestly careers.

But at 50 years old he is to retire from his service in the work and no longer serve. He may assist his brothers to fulfill responsibilities.
(Num 8:25-26 HCSB).

The priest was to retire from the heavy lifting, but his assistance and counsel would continue. In keeping with this, we shall not be shy in calling upon these brothers and sisters who have tirelessly given of themselves for the benefit of the community. Please join me in thanking each of them for this aspect of their service in the Lord.

*Alan Markwith,
Chairman,
The Christadelphian Tidings*



Melinda and Kevin Flatley

UNDERSTANDING *ANXIETY*

By Leslie Wood

ANXIETY, oh anxiety, can you please just go away? We anxiously look ahead at the looming mountain. We do not know whether to turn around or start climbing. There is no good way around this situation that is causing us anxiety. We are wide awake in the middle of the night, overthinking all that could go wrong. There is potential for a variety of complexities, whatever direction we take. Our stomach is in knots, nerves on edge, and adrenals in overdrive. Anxious thoughts may affect not only our sleep schedule but also our eating habits, relationships, and even our faith.

This article will consider the anxiety common to everyone and not trauma-induced anxiety or clinically diagnosed anxiety disorders. Much strength is found when we demystify the purpose of anxiety and learn to flip it on its head and use it to our advantage. There are also natural ways to minimize anxiety. We will find it is a secret weapon God gives us, and if used correctly, it can benefit us.

What Is Anxiety?

What exactly is anxiety? We toss this word around a lot these days. We use it interchangeably with worry, fear, and stress. Anxiety is the anticipation of something bad that could happen, a blend of fear and uncertainty. It may be triggered by an upcoming doctor's appointment, a conflict with a loved one or even a work deadline. Author Chris Bailey explains, "Anxiety is a normal response to a stressful situation, especially one we interpret as threatening."¹ When we experience anxiety, we shift from seeing how things really are to perceiving them

from the unstable state we are in. For some, anxiety does just come out of the blue. Perhaps we are unsure why we are anxious. We may wonder if there is any way to escape the occasional or constant experience of exhausting anxiety.

When we read Scripture, we realize how many circumstances would have induced anxiety. Put yourself in the sandals of any Bible character, and you can empathize with the distress of their troubles. Noah's ark bobbed in the water day after day. Jacob faced Esau and his four hundred men. David fled cave to cave from King Saul. The list goes on and on. The mountains faced by believers down through the ages seem insurmountable. The million-dollar question was, and still is: Has God given us the ability to experience anxiety for our own good? What if feeling anxious is not the problem, but how we cope with it?

Natural Responses to Anxiety

We automatically want to avoid anything uncomfortable. We cry out with David, *"My heart is sore pained within me... fearfulness and trembling are come upon me... And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest."* (Psa 55:4-6).² We may instantly take a wrong stance and deal with our situation badly or try to run from it. This reaction is called the fight-or-flight response. Our body releases hormones as an acute stress response. They prepare us to stay or run to safety. In this moment, blood going to the brain is restricted, and our thoughts get muddled. This natural reaction is meant to be unpleasant because our brains rely on

stress responses to stay alive by taking appropriate action. The good news is, if channeled well, anxiety can drive us to make adjustments that improve our lives and refine our characters.

God designed the brain to constantly keep the body in homeostasis, the body's comfort zone. When overheated, we instinctively sweat. We continually regulate. Our guard is up when there is a threat to our equilibrium. We can choose to avoid thoughts about what's causing our anxiety if we engage in a myriad of modern-day distractions. Or we can allow it to stimulate us to make beneficial changes. This result leads to positive results.

We learn early in life how to cope negatively by escape or avoidance. Our homeostasis draws us towards the immediate relief of anything painful that comes our way. We may find ourselves repetitively overindulging in alcohol, shopping, eating, gaming, or other addictive behaviors. We may throw ourselves deeper into careers, service, or exercise. We try to numb ourselves and just want to feel successful at "something." A relentless pursuit of perfection in one area of our lives often leads to harsh self-criticism and neglect of other responsibilities. Busyness for the sake of busyness is never healthy.

Or perhaps we have learned to shift the blame or manipulate others to

ease our pain. We make excuses and complicate matters. We may turn to mindless entertainment or obsess over the news. When we catch up on Facebook posts and the news, it gives us the momentary satisfaction of certainty because we know what has happened and is happening. However,

passively watching and scrolling can lead to "a cycle of distress."³ On top of that, if we have not dealt directly with the root of our anxiety, we will find ourselves in a worse state after we have indulged! The pursuit of self-gratifying relief is the opposite of yielding ourselves to the Potter's hands as vessels being molded for His glory and instruments of His

righteousness (Isa 64:8, Rom 6:13). God desires to be our refuge. (Psa 57:1; 61:4, 62:8).

Positive Responses to Anxiety

Anxiety is powerful because it is a full brain-body experience, ready to propel us into action. It is a built-in alarm that says, "Hey, wake up! There is something that needs immediate attention! Find a solution!" As we begin to listen to our inner alarm, we understand anxiety is a God-given energy to manage negative emotions, process them, and respond to the challenges they present. We cannot live on autopilot. Life's disturbances are meant to shape and transform us positively. We need to be self-aware and make an effort to navigate anxiety in a constructive direction. As we learn

We learn early in life how to cope negatively by escape or avoidance. Our homeostasis draws us towards the immediate relief of anything painful that comes our way.

to cope with stress in the moment, we may beat full-blown anxiety to the punch. There are ways to cut down on the amount and intensity of anxiety drastically. We know we are not our own when we enter a relationship with God and His Son. Our hearts, minds, and bodies belong to the LORD. As we change ourselves for God's glory, He will bless us for our efforts.

When anxiety sets in, it is helpful to pause, explore why we are uncomfortable, and pray for direction. These moments allow us to draw near to God and seek answers from His words of wisdom. We can ask for guidance from fellow believers. Our Father uses life's uncertainties to build our reliance on His care and belief in His promises, but when we are guilty of a fault and need repentance (e.g., Psalm 32). When we work through anxiety, we build resilience and character and may even depart from evil or ill choices to increase obedience and shalom (peace). *"The righteous are bold as a lion."* (Prov 28:1). We need to remind ourselves that life is composed of a series of events that prompt us to seek the truth about God and make higher, Christ-like responses to them.

God wants all our hearts. *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your discernment. Through all your ways know Him, and He will make your paths straight."* (Prov 3:5-6 Alter's Hebrew Bible).⁴ What is the status of our relationship with God? Do we immediately ask God for help? How attached are we to His promises so that we can keep our eternal perspective

when in the throes of a trial? How bright is our vision of the Kingdom Age so that we put more weight on the spiritual than the temporal? When we set our hopes rightly in God's love, we can experience shalom despite our present struggles (Isa 26:3, Phil 4:6-7). We may need to resubmit and become more dependent on God to bring calm into the circumstance. It is helpful to realize that we often achieve more in our state of weakness, knowing Jesus' strength is *"made perfect in weakness."* (2 Cor 12:9). *"I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD."* (Psa 71:16). Faith does not know how God will provide solutions, but that He definitely will.

Authentic fellowship with others relieves anxiety. Bonding and connecting with others in person or on the phone lowers cortisol (stress) levels.⁵ Eye contact especially provides much-needed consolation. We are doing ourselves no favor when we decline an invitation to dinner or skip a Bible class because we would rather hunker down alone and self-medicate. Distraction often produces more negative emotions, moodiness, and the desire to isolate more. We may think we will not do anyone any good, or it could not possibly do us any good to be with others when we are so out of sorts. Yet our Creator designed us to thrive in a community of believers. Getting together with others can "build our stress tolerance and buffer against bad anxiety."⁶ We can pray He will supply trustworthy, loving brothers and sisters to surround us. The Apostle Paul often wrote how the coming of this or that brother or sister greatly strengthened

and comforted him (Acts 28:14-15; 2 Cor 7:4-6). Let's cultivate strong relationships in the LORD.

There are a lot of things we can leave in God's care while we focus on how to conquer what is in our control. This decision helps us to transform our what-if list into a productive and goal-oriented to-do list. We stimulate new habits and add focus on Christ. When we decide to go forward in the strength of our Savior, we are more open to new experiences and have a grander purpose and freedom from unnecessary burdens. The other side of the anxiety coin is courage. Our giants become grasshoppers! Goliath is just another bear or lion. The angels are encamped around us. We can triumphantly declare, *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Rom 8:31 NKJV). God **wants** us to have courage in Him! (Josh 1:9). Our labors in the LORD courageously free us from feeling small and caught. When we take up our slingshot and five smooth stones, anxiety naturally diminishes and drives us to take wise action.

Let's touch briefly on the physical level. It is helpful to realize that the modern lifestyle is often artificial, unnatural, and overstimulating. It robs us of a

sense of calm. God created people to spend most of their time out-of-doors and to eat whole, unprocessed foods, soak up the sunshine, work manually, and then sleep soundly. Anxiety is amplified when our blood sugar gets out of balance. When we cut back on sugar and caffeine, it can drastically reduce anxiety. Deep breathing exercises are beneficial. Moderate to vigorous exercise supplies a unique benefit. "Brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) acts like a fertilizer that promotes the growth, function, and survival of brain cells, including those that turn off the stress response. Immediately after exercising, our brain cells are bathed in BDNF."⁷ God designed our brains to repair automatically. We must train ourselves to enjoy the right foods, get up and move physically, and slow down and rest soundly in Jesus.

Summary

Anxiety may not feel good, but it helps if we remember it is not supposed to because it has a powerful purpose. Our anxiety demands our thoughts, informs us of what could happen, and hopefully motivates us to respond spiritually. If we are tired of the anxiety loop, let's earnestly draw nigh to God. Open our

whole hearts and minds to Him, allow Him to search us, and reveal what He wants us to do to change. God is not limited. As our late Bro. Harry Tennant once said, “God has no problems, only solutions.”

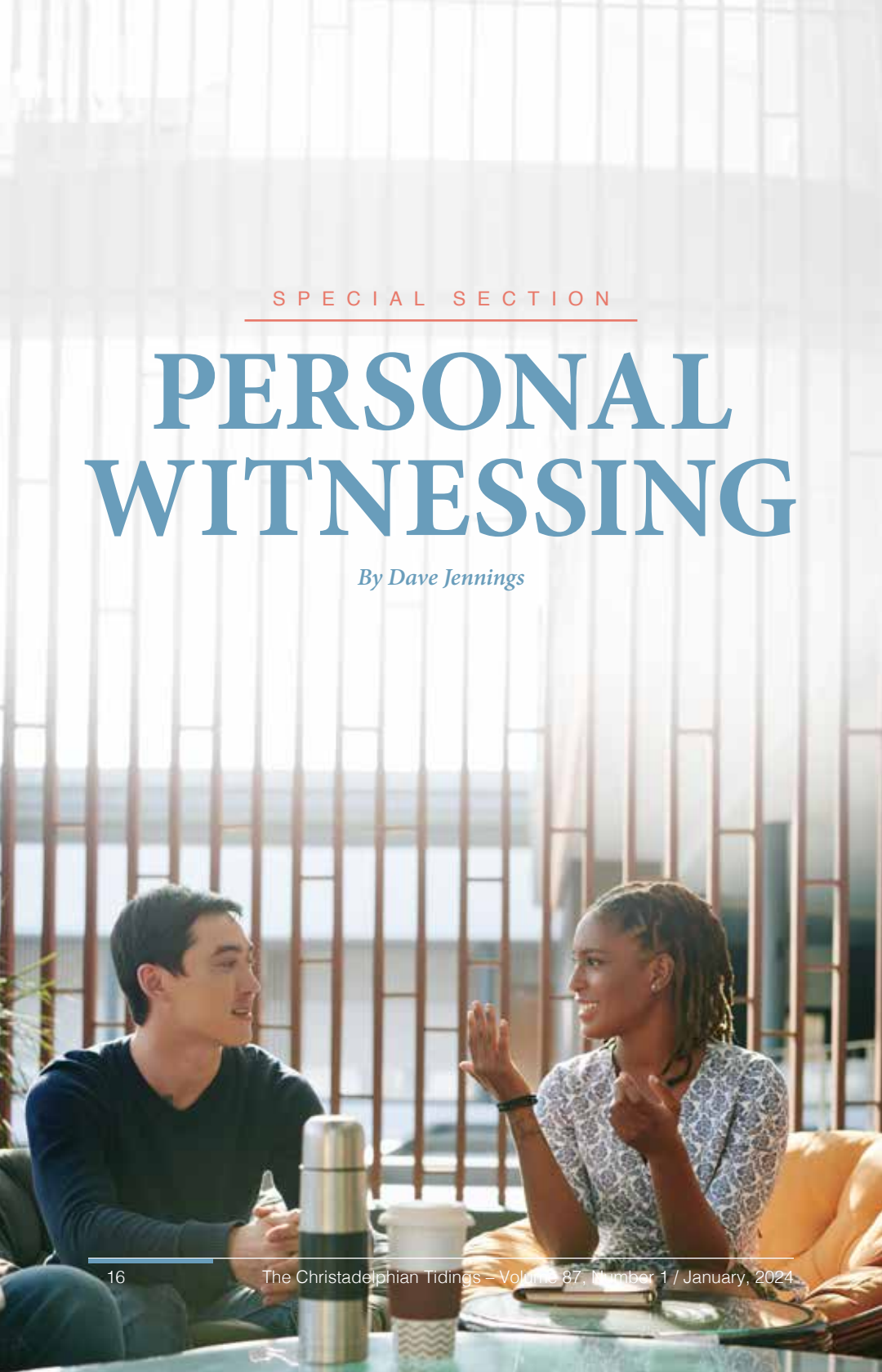
The next time anxiety pulls us into a state of panic, breathe deeply and help it along to do its work. We can confidently say, “I am driven to trust in God when I am fearful and life seems uncertain. God was faithful to me in the past, and His faithfulness will sustain me now. This looming mountain is difficult to climb, but I know God is with me. What I can do now, I will. I will feel better to do the

next thing and commit the rest to God. With Jesus, I can figure out the next steps as they come. In faith, I can move mountains!” (If you are unable to get out of the anxiety loop, you may want to find a Biblical counselor to assist.)

Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. (Isa 41:10).

Leslie Wood,
Richmond Hall Unamended Ecclesia,
VA

1. Bailey, Chris. *How to calm your mind: Finding presence and productivity in anxious times*. New York: Penguin Life, 2022. p24.
2. All Scriptural citations are taken from the King James Version, unless specifically noted.
3. Bailey, Chris. *How to calm your mind: Finding presence and productivity in anxious times*. New York: Penguin Life, 2022. p23.
4. Alter, Robert. *The Hebrew Bible: A translation with commentary*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019. p360.
5. Dennis-Tiwary, T. (2002) *Future tense: Why anxiety is good for you (even though it feels bad)*. New York: Harper Wave, 2022. p111.
6. Suzuki, Wendy and Fitzpatrick, Billie. *Good anxiety: Harnessing the power of the most misunderstood emotion*. New York: Atria Books, 2022.
7. Heisz, Jennifer. *Move the body, heal the mind: Overcome anxiety, depression, and dementia and improve focus, creativity, and sleep*. New York: Harvest Publications, 2022. p15.



SPECIAL SECTION

PERSONAL WITNESSING

By Dave Jennings

THE LORD has greatly blessed our community, providing an open window for us to share the living Word. There have been an exponential number of baptisms in some regions. Enthusiastic brothers and sisters have assisted countless men and women to come to the Truth, changing their lives forever. Thank you to all who tirelessly knocked on doors, distributed leaflets, provided public talks, led exciting Bible seminars, or provided radio and television messages for decades! Thank you for speaking the word “*in season*” to the neighbor across the fence or over a supper table. Many of us reading these articles are here because you cared and had faith sufficient to share your belief fearlessly.

Each one of us is positioned uniquely in this world. We interact with a distinctive number of people God has put in our orbit. They may be quiet colleagues in the office. They could be the troubled client you are doing home repairs for. Maybe the harried and impatient mom standing in the check-out line at the grocery store or the neighbor you wave to almost every day? No two of us have the same adjacency to these people. We are divinely given our own opportunity each day to shine the light of the gospel. In the gospel of our Lord, willing individuals, laborers in the harvest, are deeply valued.

Yet we may have lost sight of the

important principle that each of us has a non-delegable responsibility to serve as a personal witness for Jesus Christ. In 1897, Sis. Jane Roberts wrote, “Every Christadelphian is a missionary.” Over the decades, the Christadelphian community has developed powerful preaching programs, each in its own way attracting men and women to the gospel. But personal witness has always been the rock bed of preaching.

Ecclesial preaching programs have their place, but they were never intended to displace what an individual represents to the men and women they interact with daily. To them, you are the gospel.

New Methods

Christadelphians have generally not been pioneers of new preaching methods. We were not the first to do radio or television

preaching. We weren’t the first to offer Bible seminars. But as individuals and ecclesias, we are free to be inventive and try new outreach methods. Our community has learned that there is immense value in leveraging new technologies, which effectively utilize our human resources and stretch our budgets.

Learning

Until the early 1990s, ecclesias frequently depended on the “Bible talk” format. It was an old friend, a heritage of our past. In recent decades, attendance to lectures has mostly been extremely

Ecclesial preaching programs have their place, but they were never intended to displace what an individual represents to the men and women they interact with daily. **To them, you are the gospel.**

poor. There was important utility in these addresses, as it supplemented the education of our young people and the few visitors that did come. But sadly, most ads did not result in visitors from outside our ecclesia. Some concluded that because we live in a “dark and degenerate age,” our preaching must merely be a witness to a world that seemed to have no time for God. I admit to concluding this myself after countless campaign disappointments.

When public Bible seminars were introduced in the early 1990s, there was considerable excitement that this might be a new way to reach people. It certainly was! Frankly, those days in the mid-1990s were the most exciting times I have ever experienced as a Christadelphian. Suddenly, we found an overwhelming response to our ads in the same newspapers we had always advertised. Men and women eager to learn how to read their Bible more effectively filled our venues. I

remember the conclusion of the first seminar night in 1994, when, after speaking to more than 75 excited friends, I sat quietly and alone in my car in the parking lot, overwhelmed with gratitude to our Heavenly Father. Scores of baptisms from seminars and follow-on classes have greatly blessed our community. As we consider the people the LORD blessed us with, we can hardly imagine our lives without them.

As I thought through my prior conclusions about the willingness of men and women to listen to the gospel message, I realized that many had open hearts. However, our manner of teaching was just not connecting with them. It wasn't God who wasn't of interest. It was how we were talking about Him!

Today, public seminars are no longer drawing significant responses in the format we have used for thirty years. The world has changed since 1994.



Attending a public Bible talk may have represented a unique opportunity to learn about the Bible. But those were the days before the explosive Biblical content (good and bad) on the Internet today. Why would one go out on a chilly night to meet with strangers? Instead, they can sit at home in their pajamas and view Bible topics on almost any subject. But our message has not become uninteresting; Curiosity about God and His plan hasn't dried up.

Let's not make the mistake we once did, concluding men and women no longer have an interest in what the Bible has to say. The public seminar process may be seeing the end of its utility, but the world is still struggling for purpose and meaning in life. It is incumbent on us to find the next method of preaching. Newspaper advertising is no longer the faithful friend of past campaigns. We need to harness new methods of reaching out to people and participate in new networks where people spend their discretionary time. How can we use modern technologies without compromising who we are or what we teach? Our focus must change from "speakers" to "facilitators of learning." How can we use the briefest of time to help a person learn the importance of Scriptural fundamentals? We are blessed to have many great "lecturers" in Christadelphia. In the future, lecturing opportunities will be fewer, but teaching opportunities will abound. There will be innovative technologies and new ways to teach and communicate that we cannot yet envision. Before the explosion of the Internet, we would

never have dreamed the Truth could be available in every global metropolis, as well as in small hamlets or tribal villages. With all the significant threats the Internet has introduced, we can be thankful we live in an age where we can freely preach to billions of people. We don't have the infrastructure or global presence of many denominations. Yet we can get our message out through the Internet as if we did.

What Hasn't Changed?

The hands-down most effective way to preach has always been personal witnessing. Even in exponential growth regions like Africa, personal witnessing fuels the progress. But what is personal witnessing? Is it truly something we can all do?

There are two parts to our witness. First, it's about telling others what Jesus has done for the world and his destiny to rule over all the world in peace and righteousness in the Kingdom. The second aspect emphasizes our personal experience and how it has brought meaning and purpose to our lives. It's about putting our unique transformation on display. The fruit of the Spirit is the seal of authenticity that empowers our message.

Some have personally witnessed in insightful and magnificent ways. We hear impressive stories of how a complex Biblical debate brought someone to the Truth. But I suspect far more have come to know of the Truth simply because a brother or sister observed or shared what they did on vacation at Bible School. I am blessed to be part of this community

because someone invited my mother to a Bible School in 1942. Personal witnessing is not inherently difficult. It can be a simple, natural expression. Demonstrating your faithfulness to your neighborhood each Sunday by attending the meeting can be a vigorous witness. It is powerful because the Lord Jesus Christ can use that modest witness to draw a person to him. We are merely clay jars, bearing the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives. For those seeking him, we just need to make him apparent.

While it is clear that in the Last Days, there will be scoffing about the claims of the Bible, and many will abandon their faith, we also see around us today a world still looking for answers. Most are not finding viable explanations in the institutions they are turning to. It is possible there has never been a more momentous time to witness our faith. People are hearing “comic book” interpretations of prophecy. They are sometimes fed illogical and unsound sermons from their church leaders. Some are beginning to read their Bible and are quite confused as they try to understand what they should believe. They lack the foundational platforms that the gospel requires, fundamentals many of us have learned since our Sunday School days. When exposed to the Truth, things fit together and make sense. They simply need someone who cares about them to give them a hand.

A New Special Series

LORD willing, we will enjoy hearing from members of our community who

share their insights about personal witnessing. In the months ahead, we have planned the following articles:

- What Are the Biblical Models for Outreach in Scripture?
- The History of Preaching in Our Community Over 170 years.
- When God Opens a Window of Opportunity: Iranian Christadelphians in the UK.
- Personal Witnessing in Africa and the Philippines
- Praying Earnestly for God to Help Us Witness
- Overcoming Fear of Personal Witnessing
- Personal Testimonies As Part of Personal Witnessing.
- The Basics of Effective Personal Witnessing Skills for Sharing One's Faith.
- How Ecclesias Can Provide Ongoing Personal Witnessing Support.
- The Case for Formal Ecclesial Preaching Programs.
- How is Personal Witnessing Critical to the Future of North American Ecclesias?

We hope you will enjoy this series in the New Year. May we all renew our enthusiasm for touching the lives of the men and women the LORD God has put in our lives.

Dave Jennings

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interpretations of prophecy.
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PART 4 PEOPLE WHO KNOW JESUS

By Rick Hill

THIS sister did not know Jesus all her life, but I believe Jesus knew her. We read in the letter to the Ephesians:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us

in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:1-6).¹

This story, written by a lovely sister who is a “gem” in Jesus’s crown, brings Paul’s point to life. She has given this story of her trials a title she calls “My Toolbox.”

My Toolbox

Trials give us tools we can use to help others deal with troubles we have managed to overcome. When I was nine, I was hit by a car and almost lost a leg. At the age of twelve, I was sexually molested. By the age of nineteen, I had a baby that I had to give up for adoption. At the age of twenty-one, I married a man who had alcoholism. I later became a single mom of two children.

When I was about thirty, my aunt told me one day, “Have you ever thought of going to church?” I went to church with her, and at that time, I found God. Until now, I did not know that God was with me, but looking back, I now know He was with me through all my trials. Somehow, He managed to put people in my life who were going through the same things I had experienced, and I could pull from a previous trial to help them through. I started to call my trials “tools.” They were God-given tools that were always there for me to use to help others. That is why I am sharing my story now.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Cor 1:2-4 ESV).

I was baptized, but the trials did not stop. One day, my daughter and I drove home on a road we did not know and

ended up in an accident. We came to a stop sign on a crossroad that I did not see because I was blinded by the sun. As we went over the embankment, a very large tree was in the middle of our path. We were heading straight for it. I told my daughter, “Hang on. We will hit that tree.” Somehow, we missed the tree and ended up six feet down, running along a fence line until we stopped. I leaned over to my daughter and said, “God moved the car for us!” And we both prayed.

I have had a lot more trials in my lifetime, including the loss of a grandson at the age of twenty-four to a tragic accident and the loss of a great-grandson at the age of five months. I have tried to keep my grandchildren safe and loved through the many trials they have had. I have gone through two heart operations that should have taken my life, but still, God has decided to keep me here. Through each trial, God has strengthened my faith and helped me to help others with the tools I have gained. As always, my prayer is, “Thank you, God, for all that is and will be. Give me strength to go through whatever lies ahead and help me to help those you put before me and share your love and compassion.”

I hope that this helps someone in some small way.

This is an amazing, heartfelt prayer. This dear sister’s faith has kept her here for us so we can learn and be comforted by her story.

*Rick Hill,
Picton Ecclesia, ON*

EXHORTATION AND CONSOLATION

WHY MUST WE LOVE?

By Trudy Khoo



LOVE has been expounded on by millions of people all over the world. Exhorted, studied, read, explained, researched, and translated. But what does it mean to me? What does it mean to love, and what does it mean to be loved? David Viscott (1938-1996) once said, “To love and be loved is to feel the sun from both sides.”

One definition of how to love from the secular world is:

Cultivate love in your life by being loving and showing affection to others. Smile at other people and make friendly conversation with strangers. Do nice things for your friends and family, like giving them rides to work or listening when they need someone to talk to.¹

Well, that’s easy, I said. I do that all the time.

Love one another? (John 15:12) Check. The “golden rule? (Luke 6:31) Check. Owe no man but to love one another? (Rom 13:8) Check. I could go on. It’s second nature to me, I said. Done and dusted, my hands, brain, and hard work. God will surely be pleased with me.

When I read 1 Corinthians 13:4-5, it said, “*Love is patient.*” Patience is the ability to endure difficult people and situations without giving up anger or hope. Because God continues to demonstrate patience when we do disappointing things, we can show others patience when they disappoint us. Love, then, is about the ability to wait, continue doing something

despite difficulties, or suffer without complaining or becoming annoyed.

Patience became a sounding alarm as I read through the Scriptures.

With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love. (Eph 4:2).

Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer. (Rom 12:12).

Fools make fun of guilt, but the godly acknowledge it and seek reconciliation. (Prov 14:9 NLT).

Christ is patient with us. God was patient with our forefathers. I am, by occupation, a nurse. Nursing demands patience. When the infirm takes a lot of my time, I need to be longsuffering, knowing that my behavior toward them is critical to their rehabilitation. Similarly, in the ecclesia, I must show patience when my sister cries and seeks solace or when a brother asks that I be more patient with his faults. Or when a grandmother has no one to turn to. Or a widower who needs someone to spend time with during empty days. There are so many examples of those who need our love.

As I looked further at 1 Corinthians 13, I was drawn to the second line with trepidation. Paul wrote that love does not envy, boast, or act proudly. I am not living at this standard. I am guilty of all three. Guilty for all these years.

God has blessed me. God forgives and blesses the righteous. I have been the director of nursing for four hospitals. Everyone respects me because I am

kind, good and caring. I realized that everything I have done was for the glory of myself, not God's glory.

My eyes then went to verse 2, where it states that if I have no love, I am nothing.

Months of reflection and running away would not prepare me for that verse. Love now is not only the love we have for everyone around us. Love is also for our enemies. Love is to offer the other cheek. Love is to understand. God is love. Love is the “*bond of perfectness*.” (Col 3:14).

What does it take for me to love? To love my family? Of course, that is easy. To love my friends and relatives? Sometimes. To love my colleagues and boss or my brethren? Well, if they love me! To love Christ? I asked the LORD to show me the way. Psalm 143:8 was helpful:

*Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness
in the morning; for in thee do I
trust: cause me to know the way
wherein I should walk; for I lift up
my soul unto thee.*

I learned I was counting on others to love me before I would love them. I had this assurance from my family, relatives, and close friends, who have consistently supported me. Had God

loved me first? Clearly, God did love us first. The Apostle John wrote: “*We love him, because he first loved us.*” (1 John 4:19).

If God loves us first, I should also practice this with others. I will now learn to listen to others intently, even when it is difficult to bear. I will now be more helpful to my brethren, even if it is sometimes out of my way. God has put these people in my life. I am expected to serve them and learn how to love.

My expectations of others loving me first should change to loving others first because God loved me first. From now on, My actions will be more thoughtful, purposeful, listening, less boasting, less self-seeking, showing less anger, and not keeping mental records of their sins because God loved me first and has always been there for me.

How, then, can we begin to comprehend the love of God? The Apostle John shows us how.

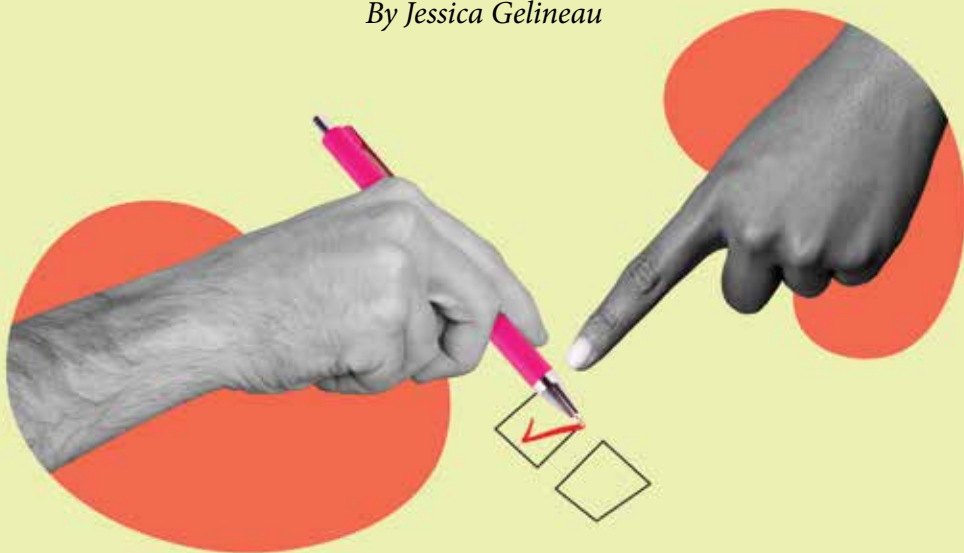
*No one has ever seen God. But if we
love each other, God lives in us, and
his love is brought to full expression
in us. (1 John 4:12 NLT).*

Trudy Khoo,
Kuala Lumpur Ecclesia, Malaysia

1. Excerpt from “*How to be Loved*”, Barile, Nicole, Ph.D., NTP, and Madeleine Criglow, December 3, 2023, www.wikihow.com/be-loved.

CALENDARING CREATIVITY

By Jessica Gelineau



IT'S the beginning of a new calendar year. Traditionally, in Western culture, this is a time to reflect on how the past year has gone and perhaps make some New Year's resolutions. We might find ourselves mulling over which habits have been working well and which ones we'd like to put behind us once and forever. We plan to find more time for exercise, make home-cooked meals most nights, or cut back on sugar. We might be considering

ways to amp up the productivity of our team, mapping out how to achieve a new sales goal, or getting ready to reinvigorate a classroom of students returning from holiday break. Many Christadelphians use January 1st as a logical date to start a Bible reading plan, syncing up with other Bible students. This practice creates opportunities and accountabilities for feeding together on God's word. All good things, all good things!

Over the last decade, I've thought a lot about the calendar, the concept of time, and how scheduling and plan-making tend to play out in my life. At the risk of making a blessing sound like a complaint (though this is unintended!), my family and I have seemingly limitless choices about how we could spend our time and who we could spend our time with. None of these opportunities is wrong, *per se*. Assuming we all agree that spiritual things¹ should be our priority and focus, let's then consider what may be a more interesting and nuanced question for those of us who aim to walk in the Spirit rather than the flesh. With so many potentially helpful options, resources, inputs, and friends, how do we, as believers, make decisions about priority?

For me, and maybe for many of us, it's easier to make sure the quantifiable tasks get on the calendar and get done rather than those more amorphous yet vital disciplines. I'll block out time for preparing children's Bible classes or cooking a meal for a burdened friend, but leave a prayer journal unwritten for days or weeks. It's a common statement that in our faith journeys, we are to avoid a "checklist mentality." But often, these conversations conclude, "because this is not the way to salvation." And rightly so. Salvation will not be ours because we have perfect attendance at mid-week Bible Class. But what other less obvious reasons might there be to avoid a "checklist mentality" regarding our spiritual activities? Could it be because it's too easy for the things that can be considered "finished," the things we could conceive of placing

a checkmark next to, to become the **only** spiritual activities we engage in? And how can overemphasizing and overscheduling these quantifiable activities impact those of us who, like our Father, love their creative time?

On a recent vacation, I knew I might have a little time to read, but I didn't bring a book other than a short devotional book. I have been reading two pages a day. It was strange because I love to read. Still, lately, I have been feeling an actual weariness of intake, even choosing to drive around town in silence rather than be accompanied by the thought-provoking podcasts I usually enjoy. Early last week, the emergency overflow valve of our circulating water heater started dumping hot water into our garage while our dishwasher was running for the night. It wasn't fun, and I don't recommend the experience. On the bright side, this is a great analogy for what I've been feeling. Hot water is something you want in your house, and spiritual food is fantastic and something you want in your body and your mind. But eventually, pressure builds up, and you need to release something. You need to respond in the way that God created you to do. What is that for you?

Writing can be that for me. As I type these thoughts right now (in a precious hour squeezed into the approaching holiday season while my husband is graciously bathing and putting the kids to bed), I feel an enormous sense of relief. Thoughts circulating in my brain like warm water are flowing onto empty virtual pages, and this action is bringing me a sense of peace. I'm

doing it for myself more than you, dear readers, though I always hope you connect with what you read here. I'm doing it because I am a creator, a tiny creative force created by a creative Father. I'm doing it because I can't help it.

Making music can be this for me, too. I recently had the enormous privilege of spending an hour with a wise and faithful woman who is my favorite musician of all time. Her children are mostly grown in their late teens and early twenties. But she was producing incredibly well-received albums when her children were young. I asked her, "How did you do it? How did you prioritize playing around with new ideas for songs on your piano with three small kids in the house?" We talked at length, and she gave me a precious gift of encouragement that my music was worth prioritizing and the time for it was worth carving out and protecting. She said this desire

was not selfish. Apparently, it's quite common for artists, even the incredibly accomplished ones, to struggle to give "vocational weight"² to their craft. When something is not your primary stated occupation or vocation, as it might appear on a form at a doctor's office (i.e., "Educator," "Homemaker"), it can be extremely hard to prioritize or give appropriate weight to that activity. **Yes, my piano playing can happen or not happen to no obvious harm to my family's daily life or our income. But what if those aren't the only factors we should consider when contemplating how we use our time?** What could be the trickle-down benefit to my family? What could be the joy, both for myself and my LORD, in my sitting down and working out the possible chord structure and lyrics to a praise song that comes straight from my heart?

Psalm 37:4 is a well-liked verse. I admit I have treated it with some skepticism in the past. Not skepticism



that God means what He says in the Scriptures, but skepticism about how I imagined it could be misapplied. “*Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart.*” (ESV). My analytical self would reply, “But what desires? “Surely not the ones referenced in passages like Ephesians 4:22-24—not the deceitful ones?” No, not those. The Psalm negates that idea anyway by first confirming that we are already making God our delight, not the flesh. Am I alone in finding it hard to hear the phrase “*the desire of your heart*” and initially thinking that we are talking about a good thing? If you’re with me on this, let’s work together to accept that the desires and longings described in the Psalms are good things. Many cultural factors have led me to subconsciously equate holiness with self-denial, even if I deny the parts of me that would be better channeled and used and enjoyed to the glory of God rather than buried with a shovel. Any of us who have traveled through airports will have heard warnings not to leave our belongings unattended. In a book I was reading recently, a photo of a sign struck me that read, “Attention: Do not leave your longings unattended.”³ Indeed.

And a word about feeling like we always need to finish a thing for it to count as an appropriate use of time (if, indeed, you, like me, do tend this way). Following Paul’s beautiful exhortation

about the power and life of God at work in us, even while we are suffering afflictions and persecutions, he writes:

Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Cor 4:16, 18 CSB).

I use this passage not to imply that Paul is talking specifically about creative practices here as the renewal method. But it provides a good reminder for us that the activities we value and

prioritize and focus on most do not need to be the things we and others can see, check off or quantify.

How much of our time is scheduled out? Are there different types of “spiritual activities” we should let take turns of our time? We can consider these questions as we hope

and dream for our next year. **The times I connect with the LORD are moments I cannot ultimately plan.** What I can do is put habits in place that will allow space for Him to speak. I love to use my planner to write down dinner dates and doctor appointments, but what if I used my planner more often this year to block out time for creativity, personal and ecclesial worship, and quiet time with my LORD? Time to respond to Him, release output, and close off all of the inputs for a moment, no matter how valuable or Godly they are. What

If and when you are resolving to start or reinstate some great spiritual habits in 2024, consider allowing your creative longings a little more space.

if I prioritized and protected activities that incite spiritual longings and, as the phrase goes, “Give me a glimpse of the Kingdom”? Life is heavy. In the past week, I got together with friends and sang true, beautiful, Jesus-centered songs together. And by the end of it, I felt about a thousand times lighter. I want to do more of **that** this year.

Please, then, take this message away from what I’m saying. If and when you are resolving to start or reinstate some great spiritual habits in 2024, consider allowing your creative longings a little more space. This idea might seem a little foolish, unimportant, or just downright impossible. But I’m telling myself, with the help of God-given

discernment, I **know** which of these things **renew** me. And I delight in being renewed day by day, as we live under the rule of this calendar, and ultimately, completely. Eternally.

What creative activities renew **your** inner being? Happy New Year!

*Jessica Gelineau,
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA*

1. This could lead to the question of “Which things are spiritual?”—be a long discussion in itself. If we walk according to the Spirit, can we consider all aspects of our life spiritual? See Romans 8. I would add that I prefer using the term “life in the Spirit” versus “my spiritual life;” the latter sounds like a compartmentalization to my ears.
2. An aside: though the word vocation is most commonly used in contemporary language as a synonym for occupation, it has its roots in Christianity. It carries a sense of calling, of being created specifically for a certain work. In this sense, I could describe musicianship as a vocation, though it is not what I would write as my primary occupation on that aforementioned doctor’s office form.
3. Kleon, Austin (2012). *Steal Like an Artist*. Workman Publishing Co. Inc. Page 69.

Music and Praise section editor, Jessica Gelineau, would love to engage with you and dive into conversations around the intersection of inspiration, creativity, music, and praise.

Please reach out if you have a thought to share or to further a conversation you’ve seen started in this installment of “On Creating.”

You can send emails to jessica.r.gelineau@gmail.com

PART 5

WORDS I HOPE I NEVER HEAR AGAIN

By David Levin

*Christadelphian Cliches, Misquotes,
Pat Phrases, Wrested Scriptures, and
Legalistic Formulas*



Gratuitous Original Language References

THIS month's entry moves away from examining specific phrases and misquotes, instead addressing the topic of original language references. Being much more familiar with Hebrew than Greek, I use mostly Hebrew examples below, but the principles apply to both.

Christadelphian speakers and teachers frequently refer to words in the original languages of the Bible. These references might include the following:

- Keying a word to its Strong's catalog number
- Asserting a word's "real" or proper meaning
- Proposing several alternate translations
- Using a word's root to derive its meaning
- Trying to pronounce and/or spell the word

Original language references are stock-in-trade for Bible school classes and study days, regardless of the speaker's knowledge of Hebrew or Greek. This practice is more than accepted. It is expected. The unwritten rule of Christadelphian rhetoric is "You shall by no means fail to utter the original Hebrew."

What's wrong with it?

Citing the words "in Hebrew" has two drawbacks. First, reference to the "original" is rarely needed to make a didactic or spiritual point. It's just a way for a brother to display his "credentials" as a bona fide teacher. Second, and

far more serious, original language references promote a simplistic and misleading view of how languages and translation work, fostering the conception that Biblical Hebrew is a "code" that is readily converted into English by anyone with a key to the code, that is, a concordance or lexicon.

What's at stake?

The speaker's integrity and a community's knowledge of how Hebrew (or any language) works and how translation works. Seldom is critical teaching at stake. There is little downside to dropping the window-dressing of citing the original Hebrew.

How can it be fixed?

- With respect to words in the original language, stick to Bible study, which is our forte. The two principal methods are linking passages where the same word occurs and examining the contexts where a given word occurs. When teaching, you don't need to speak Hebrew; "same word" suffices.
- When updating KJV archaisms, cite extant translations and versions rather than taking a tortuous tour of what "the Hebrew word really means" and ending up with what half the audience already has in front of them.
- Omit references to Strong's numbers and the like. This practice adds no useful information and only reinforces the notion that the original languages of the Bible are simple codes readily converted into English, like solving a simple code $A = F$, $B = G$, and so on.

- Giving the Hebrew word in a passage and trying to pronounce it is about as useful as your pharmacist giving you the chemical name and molecular structure of the active ingredient in a medicine. For the few that can use this information, it's available, and leave it at that, unless you know the language and you're reproducing one of the many wordplays in the Hebrew Bible.
- Do not assert that because a word is translated a certain way in one place, it has the same meaning elsewhere. It might, but unless you are familiar with how Hebrew semantics works, you're much more likely to be wrong than right.
- The Old Testament is replete with multiple appearances of a theme word in a narrative; this feature emphasizes a point and adds literary cohesiveness. However, you won't always see these in English translations if occurrences of the word are translated differently. It's great to find these and mention them in your talks, but in no case are you helping your audience by trying to pronounce the word or suggesting that the translators got it wrong by translating one way in this verse and another way two verses later.
- Avoid using the "majority rules" style of determining the meaning of a word, though it's still useful information. If a Hebrew word is translated one way 25 times and only five times another way, that does not mean that five are incorrect or inferior translations. Using an example from English, "resistant" could just as easily denote "stubborn" as it does "durable," depending on context. If a text calls for one usage much more than another, it doesn't mean the minority occasions are wrong. This is true for any translation and the Hebrew Bible, probably more so. Hebrew words tend to have wide semantic ranges, and



the texts encompass a huge time span wherein meanings and usage change.

- When you find it appropriate to proffer an alternate translation, cite your source(s). For example, “Alter translates this word as... and that makes sense to me.” This approach is honest and a lot safer than saying, “This word really means...”

Discussion:

Language is a complex, organic feature of human life. Each one of us has our own unique vocabulary chosen from within the resources of our native tongue, with unique meanings assigned to those words and utterances according to our age, geographical location, educational level, personality, personal history, family of origin, and all the factors that make each of us an individual. In communication, you can share your thoughts, information, and desires with others of the same language community. As you have experienced many times, though, speaking the same language is no guarantee of successful communication.

Given that language communication between any two native speakers of the same language is difficult enough, how can you claim knowledge of texts from an ancient culture written millennia ago in a language far removed from

English in grammar, vocabulary, sound, and orthography? With your two years of high school Spanish, would you attempt to translate Don Quixote? Then what are you doing asserting the “real” meaning of words and sentences from classical Hebrew?

Making assertions about the meaning of Hebrew words is the business of historians, linguists, philologists, epigraphers, and others with the scholarly background to assess the above factors. You do not have anything close to that level of expertise. You have

access to their works, many written for lay Bible students. You can use concordances, lexicons, and other language study aids for your own edification. Still, when conclusions based on these resources are publicly proclaimed under the rubric “the Hebrew word here really

means,” it leads to an oversimplified concept of how languages really work.

Even if you’re aware that you’re oversimplifying the matter of translation when citing a word from a lexicon or concordance, the implicit message to the listeners is “Just get a lexicon or concordance, and you can know the real meaning of the Bible.”

This point is both subtle and serious. Every time a speaker asserts “the real meaning” or “correct translation,” it weakens, not strengthens, our understanding of Hebrew because

Avoid using the
“majority rules” style
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it vastly depreciates the nature and practice of translation.

Complexities and Cautions

Biblical Hebrew employs a relatively spare vocabulary for historical narrative, partially because many Hebrew words encompass a range of meanings. For instance, the same word, depending on context, can indicate “sound,” “voice,” “thunder,” “proclamation,” or “noise.” Hebrew has many semantic ranges as broad as common English words such as “take” or “run,” and thus are translated with several different English words. It is a huge mistake, but one I have heard all too often, for a speaker to assert that because a word means X in one passage, it can (or does) mean X in another—because that’s the translation that suits the speaker’s point.

Poetry (Psalms and much of the prophets) ranges from relatively straightforward to utterly opaque. Hebrew poetry, compared to narrative prose, tends to have specialized vocabulary and like any poetry, flexible

word order. You cannot draw the same inferences from poetry as from historical narrative.

Hebrew can be remarkably terse and cryptic, especially the Proverbs. Hebrew uses far fewer words than English, having many affixes and routinely omitting words, leaving much inferred. For instance, the famous warning (today we call it “trash talk”) from Ahab to Benhadad (1 Kgs 20:11 ESV), “*let not him who straps on his armor boast as he who takes it off*” is expressed by only four Hebrew words, none of which is “armor.” There’s much to read between the words, let alone between the lines.

Hebrew idioms are a “whole ‘nother” matter. They occur regularly, often in straightforward contexts that seem quaint to English speakers, adding to the complexity of translation.

Hebrew roots (usually three-letter verb stems) connote fundamental movements, such as arise, strike, scatter, or gather. These are not always reliable guides to the meaning. Further, Hebrew verbs have a number

Making reference to Hebrew words rarely adds to the spiritual value of a class, even less to an exhortation. Stick with the aspects of Bible teaching that **genuinely promote reverence of God’s word and develop a spiritual mind.**

of grammatical forms that nuance or change basic meanings—and neither Young's nor Strong's distinguish among these.¹

I briefly list these features of Biblical Hebrew as a caution. Translation is a highly complex matter, not a simple one-to-one word correspondence. However, original language references are de rigueur for any Bible school class or lecture, often even in exhortations. It's what Christadelphian speakers do; it's part of the aura of the "speaking brother." Never mind that you're a high school teacher, accountant, or whatever; you're expected to cite Hebrew words.

I have heard speakers carry on at length about the "real meaning" of Hebrew words, citing several passages, none of which add anything at all to the spiritual lesson allegedly being taught. Making reference to Hebrew words rarely adds to the spiritual value of a class, even less to an exhortation. Stick

with the aspects of Bible teaching that genuinely promote reverence of God's word and develop a spiritual mind.

Greek

English is far closer to Greek than Hebrew, and it has many Greek-based (some via Latin) words (especially in the sciences) that we use daily. Pointing out these connections often aids in understanding or remembering a text. One example: the word "crooked," as in "crooked generation" (Phil 2:15), is the word from which we get the medical term "scoliosis," or curvature of the spine. Noting links (from Greek to English) like that can leave the listener with a memorable visual imprint of a passage.

N.B.—The author pleads guilty to multiple counts of the above offenses.

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1. If you read Hebrew, I recommend Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance. There's a revised edition, which I haven't seen, but I suppose has the same format.

PART 4

GETTING TO KNOW OUR GOD AND JESUS

By Sue and Jim Styles

God's Amazing Flexibility

ANOTHER area in which we have had to modify our understanding over the years is the matter of God's willingness to change His pathway in response to what His children ask of Him. We have learned to sit back no longer passively and wait to see what God will choose to do in our lives, but rather consistently talk to Him and ask for specific outcomes if it is His

will. This approach to how God works in our lives makes prayer powerful. Our prayers are not only to impact and change us, but at times, they can impact God and Jesus and change how they might accomplish His will.

Consider the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18. There's no doubt at all why Jesus gave this parable. Luke records that Jesus "*told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to*

pray and not lose heart." (v. 1).¹ We used to call this parable "the parable of the unjust judge," but you can see by context that it really isn't so much about the judge as it is about the persistent woman. At the parable's end, Jesus says, *"And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?"* (v. 7). So the parable's point is to illustrate that God hears our prayers and may respond to our cries. Let's be like the persistent widow and keep asking and talking to God!

We need to be patient in our requests to God. It's His timeline and His family. Abraham and Sarah had to wait over thirty years to have the child of the promise. Isaac and Rebekah had to wait twenty years to have children. Jacob waited almost forty years after holding on to the angel while begging him to do something to save his family, to see his family finally grow spiritually. Joshua and Caleb waited almost forty years to finally enter the promised land, even though they had not failed in their faith. David struggled and fled from Saul for about fifteen years after being anointed King to finally become King over Judah. Patience, patience, patience! It's God's timeline, and He wants us to grow our relationship with Him to the point where we will trust Him in everything.

Sometimes, God Will Accommodate Our Requests

In Genesis 18, Abraham talked to the LORD and asked if He would spare Sodom if there were fifty righteous, then forty, and finally all the way down

to ten. The amazing part of this incident is that the angel was willing to spare the city for Abraham's sake if he found ten righteous in Sodom. Abraham did not think it was wrong to ask and believed God could modify His plan if He found ten righteous in the city. Some might think that since Abraham talked with an angel, only angels, not God, can modify their plans. But the point here is that plans can sometimes be modified if we ask. Later, we will see that angels and God sometimes modify their plans because believers request a change.

Gideon was very afraid of the job God asked him to do in Judges 6. Gideon twice asked God for a sign with the fleece, and each time, God was willing to provide the support Gideon needed to increase his faith. When the Lord told Samuel (1 Sam 16) to anoint a new King beside Saul, Samuel was afraid. He said to the Lord, *"How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me."* (v. 2). So God compassionately dealt with Samuel's fears and created a plan to accomplish the goal without Saul knowing in order to protect Samuel's life. The LORD said, *"Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' And invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do. And you shall anoint for me him whom I declare to you."* (v. 2-3). God could have just told Samuel to "Go as I told you!" but He understood Samuel's fears and modified the plan to help Samuel through it.

Remember when Hezekiah held his huge Passover and invited people from the north to attend? The Bible records:

For a majority of the people, many of them from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover otherwise than as prescribed. For Hezekiah had prayed for them, saying, "May the good Lord pardon everyone who sets his heart to seek God, the LORD, the God of his fathers, even though not according to the sanctuary's rules of cleanness." And the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people. (2 Chr 30:18-20).

Notice the direct link in the record that the LORD heard Hezekiah's prayer, so He healed the people. Our God is not a rigid ruler waiting for us to break a rule so that He can punish us! He is a compassionate, loving heavenly Father who understands our weaknesses and is willing to bend the rules and accommodate us in our times of need. What a wonderful example of how we must learn to deal with our children and ecclesial members who are trying to aim at God's high standard but who, at times, fail.

Notice how Jesus handled the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15. Jesus tried to escape the Pharisees, who were attempting to drive a wedge between Jesus and his disciples. On the way to the region of Tyre, the woman of Canaan cried to him, *"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."* (v. 22). The disciples asked Jesus to send her away, and Jesus tried to explain to her he was sent to the lost sheep of Israel, but the woman kept coming (just like the persistent woman in the parable). Finally, when Jesus saw her

faith, he responded to her continual pleading and healed her daughter. This healing may not have been in Jesus' plan for that day, but he responded to the sincere pleas of a faithful woman and modified his plan. In fact, not only was his plan for that day modified, but he realized God was showing him this was a turning point in his ministry and that he needed to go back to the Gentile area of the Decapolis, where he then feed the 4,000, many of whom were Gentiles! Jesus lived and responded much like God. He listened to the crying and pleading of a faithful woman and responded by modifying his plan to accommodate her needs. As we come to know our God and Lord Jesus better, we too can learn to respond to the needs of others, even if it involves modifying our plans.

Sometimes, God Will Change His Revealed Pathway

Remember when the angels rescued Lot from Sodom in Genesis 19? They told him to *"Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away."* But Lot said to them, *"Please, no, my lords! (v. 18)."*² Wouldn't you think that Lot would do whatever the angels asked after being rescued from destruction in Sodom by the grace of God? But he feared disaster would overtake him in the hills and he would die, so he asked permission to flee to Zoar, and the angels modified their plan to accommodate Lot's fears.

When Moses was gone for forty days up in the mountain, and the people rebelled, the LORD said to Moses:

I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them

and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you. (Exod 32:9-10).

But Moses pleaded with God, reminded him of how the Egyptians would view this, and also mentioned the promises to Abraham. So *“The Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.”* (v.14). This angel was ready to wipe out most of the nation right then and re-grow it from Moses like he had done earlier with Abraham. But because of Moses’ pleading, God modified the plan. Notice that in the end, because of their unbelief, most of this generation died off in

the wilderness, and God swore in His wrath that they would never enter His rest (Heb 4:3; Psalms 95:11). In the end this did not change the result, but because of Moses’ pleading and asking, God modified the plan to let them live for now and raise the next generation. As God reminded Moses, *“Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book.”* (v. 33).

When the Assyrians invaded Israel and Hezekiah became sick, the prophet Isaiah told him:

Thus says the LORD, “Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover,” but then Hezekiah prayed and wept bitterly. Before Isaiah had walked very far, God told him to go back and tell Hezekiah, “I have heard your

prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD, and I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria.” (2 Kgs 20:1-6).

If Hezekiah hadn’t responded and prayed, he would have died without a son, and one of his brothers or uncles would have become the next King. When God saw his sincere response, God agreed to add fifteen years to his life and deliver him and Jerusalem from the Assyrians. This is a dramatic lesson for when dreadful

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things happen in our lives. God is waiting to see how we respond, and He may change His intended pathway depending on how we deal with and respond to the situation and what we ask of Him.

Sometimes God Will Work With the Pathway We Choose

Most of the time, we need to decide on a pathway moving forward prayerfully and then faithfully continue in prayer that God will bless our plan or make it clear that this is not a good pathway. In Genesis 24, Abraham made Eliezer swear not to take a wife for Isaac from the Canaanites but to go to Paddan-aram to find a wife for Isaac, and God blessed Abraham’s pathway. Note in verse 12 that Eliezer understood and used Abraham’s method when

We choose a plan to move forward, knowing God can bless that plan, but also very aware that He might decide to go down a different pathway. **It's all God's choice**, but *"we know that for those who love God all things work together for good."* (Rom 8:28)

he prayed that God would bless his mission and provide a woman who would give him a drink and water his camels. From Abraham, Eliezer learned that he could choose a pathway and then pray that God would bless that choice.

When Saul forced David to leave the land (1 Sam 21), he decided to live near Achish, king of Gath, in Philistine territory. David was very afraid of Achish, so he pretended to be insane when he came before Achish. We might think this was just a clever plan by David, but he revealed his fears and his dependence on God to bless this pathway in Psalm 34 when he wrote:

I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. (Psa 34:4-7)

David completely put his trust in God's ability to bless the choice David made, and somehow make it work against all odds!

In Esther 4, Mordecai reminded Esther to trust that God could bless his plan to have Esther appeal to the king for her people. Mordecai didn't know for sure God would prosper his plan, but he did

know that if Esther remained silent, she and her father's house would perish, and God would provide deliverance from another place. That's how faith works! We choose a plan to move forward, knowing God can bless that plan, but also very aware that He might decide to go down a different pathway. It's all God's choice, but *"we know that for those who love God all things work together for good."* (Rom 8:28)

God Can Even Use Our Mistakes and Sins to Bring About Good

The most impressive case of this is in Genesis 50 when Jacob died, and Joseph's brothers made up a story about Jacob requesting that they beg Joseph to forgive their sin and all the evil they did against him because they thought once Jacob was dead, Joseph would punish them. Joseph clearly states that he knows, *"as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today"* (v. 20). Joseph learned how to forgive people who plan and carry out evil against him, by trusting that God is in control, and has the power to turn evil intentions into good for those who love God. God did this with the covenant with the Gibeonites in Joshua 9, and He even allowed David to father Solomon by Bathsheba after he committed

adultery and murder. When Onesimus ran away from Philemon, God had Paul convert him and then sent him back as Philemon's brother in Christ!

Some Outcomes Are Fixed With Only One Pathway God Will Use

The clearest case of this is when Jesus prayed in the garden for God to find another way to save us all besides his own crucifixion. Jesus totally understood that God's pathway can be altered, so he asked for another way. But at the same time, he realized that God fixes some pathways and will not be altered. So, he trusted his request to his loving Father and submitted with "your will be done." (Matt 26:42). You will find similar situations in Abraham pleading for Ishmael in Genesis 18, David pleading for the life of his first child with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 12:16. Jeremiah had to be told not to continue praying for his people (14:11; 15:1). In all these cases God had determined a pathway that would not be altered, and faithful people had to submit to God's choice and let His will be done.

The Lessons For Us

This article has been all about the power of prayer. Our loving heavenly

Father and Jesus, our Savior, listen to all our prayers. They have the power to accommodate us by making pathways work that we choose, or by changing pathways they have chosen. In any case, we need "always to pray and not lose heart." (Luke 18:1) because we know they are in control. When we realize how flexible our God and Jesus are with us, it should motivate us to be like them and accommodate the needs of others whenever we can. Our faith must grow to become so strong that we believe God will bring about our eternal good no matter what others do to us, which pathways we have chosen, or what events are the will of God that we cannot change.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thess 5:16-18).

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1. All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version.
2. This is one of the places the Sopherim changed Yahweh to Adonai because they couldn't understand how Lot would call the angels "Yahweh." Google it!

PART 4

PREACHING THE FIRST PRINCIPLES IN A POST-CHRISTIAN WORLD

By Richard Morgan

THE Apostle Paul's commission was to "open [the Gentiles'] eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light" (Acts 26:18)¹ words taken from Isaiah 42:7, "to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." Surely, then, Paul was thinking of this context in Isaiah when said in his speech at the Areopagus tribunal, "*The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth*" (Acts 17:24). These are words quoted from a previous verse in the chapter from Isaiah:

Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it. (Isa 42:5).

Paul's message to the Athenians then comes from verse 8, "*I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.*" (Isa 42:8)

At the end of Acts 17:24, having described the God (*ho theos*), the ESV says of Him He "*does not live in temples made by man*" or, as the Greek says, literally "*made by hands.*" The Greek expression χειροποίητος is found fourteen times in the Septuagint. Still, seven of them are in the prophecy of Isaiah, each in a passage that is a pejorative reference to idolatry. For instance:

They that furnish gold out of a purse, and silver by weight, will weigh it in a scale, and they hire a goldsmith and make idols [LXX χειροποίητος], and bow down, and worship them. (Isa 46:6 Brenton Septuagint Translation)

Paul said, "*Nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.*" (Acts 17:25).

Once again, Paul can establish common ground with some of those listening to him. The Stoic philosopher Seneca wrote this:

We should like to forbid offering linen garments and a stiff brush to Jupiter and holding up a mirror to Juno: the gods need no domestic servants. And why is this so? Because he himself serves the human race, he is present everywhere and to everyone... It is the gods who direct the course of the world, who order the universe with their power, and maintain the human race in existence. (Ep. 95.47-50).

Paul agrees with Seneca that God is "present everywhere and to everyone" and that He "direct[s] the course of the world" and wants to establish the supreme sovereignty of Yahweh. Notice the emphasis in verse 25 about *ho theos*—"he gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." To this, the Stoics would nod their heads. Paul is building bridges.

But he wants to expand on the notion of the sovereignty of Yahweh so in the next verse adds "*And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place*" (v. 26). Notice the emphasis again—God created one man and from him every nation—including the Athenians.

Once again, Paul is thinking of Deuteronomy 32, where we find similar words:

Do you thus repay the LORD, you foolish and senseless people? Is not he your father, who created you, who made you and established you? Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you. When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God (Deut 32:6-8).

If Paul was alluding to verse 8, he also had the previous two verses in mind. He was talking to a “foolish and senseless people” (v. 6) who lived in a forest of idols, but he wanted to let them know that Yahweh, God of Israel, was their “father” (v6—see Acts 17:28-29).

So, his appeal to the Athenians is “that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.

Yet he is actually not far from each one of us” (v. 27). These words are a polite reference to the blindness of the Gentiles. Their need to “feel their way toward him” uses an expression that is used several times in the Septuagint for people groping in the dark (e.g., Deut 28:29; Job 5:14; Isa 59:10, which says, “We grope for the wall like the blind”). Intriguingly the expression is also used for idols:

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them. (Psa 115:4-8).

Verse 7 says, “They have hands, but do not feel” and this polemic highlights the foolishness of worshiping idols that have body parts but can’t feel anything. “Those who make them become like



them” (v. 8) says the psalmist, or as Deuteronomy 32:6 says, they are “senseless.”

The phrase “not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27) echoes Isaiah 55:6, where we are advised to “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near” and mentions in the previous verse “a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you” referring to the Gentiles.

Again, these words resonate with the Stoic view. Seneca wrote:

One need not lift one’s hands to heaven nor implore the temple guardian to give us access to the ear of the divine statue, as though our prayer would be better heard there; the god is near you, he is with you, he is in you. (Ep. 4:1-2)

However, this is also where he parts ways with the Epicureans who, as functional atheists, believed the gods lived in a far-off realm and had no dealings with human beings. When establishing common ground, it is important for us to realize that we can’t go about trying to agree with **everything**. By now, however, Paul has established enough of a rapport with his listeners that he can begin to say things that will be more controversial for his listeners.

But Paul is not done yet, and he builds an even more solid bridge to the Stoics, especially in verse 28:

For “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we are indeed his offspring” (Acts 17:28).

Paul even directly quotes their own poets. The first quote is also from a poet, Epimenides, who we met in last month’s article, the originator of the altar to the Unknown God. You will recognize the words because they’re from the same section he quoted from Epimenides in Titus 1:12:

A grave has been fashioned for thee, O holy and high One,

The lying Cretans, who are all the time liars, evil beasts, idle bellies;

But thou diest not, for to eternity thou livest and standest,

For in thee we live and move and have our being.

However, the sentiment is also found in the Stoic Cleanthes’ Hymn to Zeus:

Most glorious of the immortals, invoked by many names, ever all-powerful, Zeus, the First Cause of Nature, who rules all things with Law, Hail! It is right for mortals to call upon you, since from you **we have our being**, we whose lot it is to be God’s image, we alone of all mortal creatures that **live and move** upon the earth.

Then, in the latter half of verse 28, Paul quotes from *Phaenomena*, written by another Stoic, Aratus:

From Zeus let us begin; him do we mortals never leave unnamed; full of Zeus are all the streets and all the market-places of men; full is the sea and the havens thereof; always we all have need of Zeus. For we are also his offspring; and

he in his kindness unto men giveth favourable signs and wakeneth the people to work, reminding them of livelihood. He tells what time the soil is best for the labour of the ox and for the mattock, and what time the seasons are favourable both for the planting of trees and for casting all manner of seeds. For himself it was who set the signs in heaven, and marked out the constellations, and for the year devised what stars chiefly should give to men right signs of the seasons, to the end that all things might grow unfailingly. Wherefore him do men ever worship first and last. Hail, O Father, mighty marvel, mighty blessing unto men.

Paul is getting to the heart of Stoicism with these quotes because both Aratus and Cleanthes were direct disciples of the Stoics' founder, Zeno.

The *Hymn to Zeus and Phaenomena* laud the head god of the Greek pantheon, Zeus, and speak of mankind's total dependence on him. Paul will take these words and explain that, instead, they apply to the one true God, whose name is Yahweh.

Having quoted from their own poet about being God's offspring, Paul follows it up in verse 29 by saying,

"Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man." Heraclitus, another Stoic philosopher, would agree:

[W]here is god? Is he shut up in temples? You are a fine sort of pious men, who set up god in darkness! A man takes it as an insult if he is said to be stony; but is a god truly spoken of whose honorific title is "he is born from crags?" You ignorant men, don't you know that god is not wrought by hands and has not from the beginning had a pedestal, and does not have a single enclosure? Rather the whole world is his temple, decorated with animals, plants, and stars. (Translation and text taken from Harold W. Attridge, *First-Century Cynicism in the Epistle of Heraclitus*, 58-59).

Paul agrees with Heraclitus but once again also alludes to the prophet of Isaiah:

To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? An idol! A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains. He who is too impoverished for an offering

The Hymn to Zeus and Phaenomena laud the head god of the Greek pantheon, Zeus, and speak of mankind's total dependence on him. Paul will take these words and explain that. **Instead, they apply to the one true God, whose name is Yahweh.**

chooses wood that will not rot; he seeks out a skillful craftsman to set up an idol that will not move. (Isa 40:18-20)

Paul's point is this: we are God's offspring. As Cleanthes wrote (see the quote above), our lot is to be "God's image." God cannot be represented as "*an image formed by the art and imagination of man.*" (v. 29). His offspring are called upon to be in God's image. As Paul said in verse 28, in God, "*we live and move and have our being.*" That can't be said of idols:

To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike? Those who lavish gold from the purse, and weigh out silver in the scales, hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; then they fall down and worship! They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble. (Isa 46:5-7).

Now, towards the end of his speech, Paul has expertly brought his listeners' attention to the doctrine of God manifestation. He hasn't done it by opening a single passage of the Bible, something that would have been lost on all of them. He may have alluded to Scripture, but he directly quoted their own writings, something that

they would have been familiar with. He hasn't bamboozled them with Christian jargon.

The Gentile world was groping in darkness, but as Paul himself wrote, "*Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires.*" (Rom. 2:14). The same is true today. Whether it's been a matter of Bible ethics being filtered down into societal thinking or simply because Bible ethics make sense, even though the world around us is in darkness as to the identification of the one true God, there is a semblance of understanding in the writings and philosophies of the world that we can take advantage of in our preaching efforts. We need to build bridges and establish common ground. That doesn't mean we have to agree with everything, but we can find things in the ideas of today that match the Biblical record and first principles, like God manifestation. We're not going to get through to people by holding a talk on "God manifestation" using Christadelphian jargon and quoting from a book that people don't respect. At least not yet.

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THE HISTORICITY OF JESUS'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION

by Steve Davis

The Brutal Practice of Crucifixion

FOR Jews living under Roman occupation, there was no such thing as a wondrous cross.¹ Crucifixion was an especially cruel form of public execution designed to torture its victims and terrorize the people who witnessed it. Around the time Jesus' family returned from Egypt, the Romans crushed a revolt led by Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:37) when they burned the city of Sepphoris (four miles from Nazareth) and publicly crucified 2000 of its inhabitants.² It's hard to imagine what life must have been like for young Jesus and his neighbors as families dealt with the social and psychological trauma of these atrocities.

Jesus knew all about the pain and shame of crucifixion, having probably witnessed others dying on the cross. And our Lord lived, knowing he would someday die that same way. Early in his ministry, he told Nicodemus, *"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up."* (John 3:14)³ Later in the same Gospel, John records Jesus predicting his death,

Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now

is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. (John 12:27-33 ESV).

All four Gospel accounts describe the death of Jesus on the cross exactly as he predicted. Mark succinctly says, *"But Jesus let out a loud cry and breathed his last."* (Mark 15:37 HCSB). Soon after Jesus's death, his followers claimed they had seen him alive again.

The extraordinary claim of Jesus' resurrection has been doubted by many over the years, starting when rumors first began to circulate that Jesus' disciples had stolen his body, resulting in the *"empty tomb."* (Matt 28:13). Since then, other theories have been proposed to cast doubt on the miracle of the resurrection.

The Physical Death of Jesus of Nazareth

In the late 1700s, a German scholar proposed that Jesus had not died but had feigned his death through drugs (provided by his physician, Luke), only to be later resuscitated in the tomb.⁴ For a while, this "swoon theory" gained traction, and others began to promulgate similar explanations that Jesus did not die but had merely become unconscious. Today, most scholars reject such an idea, given what science tells us about the effects of torture and crucifixion on the body. The scourging of our Lord's back, followed by the piercing of the nails, hours on the cross, and a final thrust of a spear into his side would have undoubtedly proved fatal.

The Journal of the American Medical Association agreed:

Clearly, the weight of historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to his side was inflicted and supported the traditional view that the spear, thrust between his right ribs, probably perforated not only the right lung but also the pericardium and heart and thereby ensured his death. Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge.⁵

Not only does modern medical interpretation point to the physical death of our Lord, but Jesus' death was also reported by several ancient unbiased, non-Christian sources as well.^{6,7,8} The historical evidence for Jesus of Nazareth's life and death is both long-established and widespread. Serious antiquity scholars agree that Jesus was a historical figure and dismiss denials of his existence as a fringe theory.⁹

Evidence for the Physical Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Myth Busters

The early teaching of the resurrection soon after Jesus' death and burial began after his followers proclaimed he was alive and had risen from the dead. More than that, they stated he was different and now could walk through walls and even disappear at will.^{10,11} These sorts of claims are often dismissed as legends or stories passed down from generation to generation, with each retelling exaggerating and embellishing the true facts. However, the claims of Jesus' followers fundamentally differ from the stories of Paul Bunyan or Johnny Appleseed in one important matter. Unlike legends that often take multiple generations to develop, the claims of the resurrection of Jesus were recorded right away. According to Oxford academic and ancient historian A.N. Sherwin-White, "Even two generations [about seventy years total] are too short a span to allow the mythical tendency to prevail over the hard historical core of the oral tradition."¹⁰



Scholars today agree that Jesus died around AD 30 and that some New Testament letters were written within 15 or 20 years of his death.¹² The time gap between Jesus' death and the writing of these letters (or the Gospels themselves) is too short for legend status to develop. Furthermore, when we examine 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, it becomes clear that at this point in history, the teaching about Jesus' death and resurrection was already a doctrine of first importance; it was being taught even before these early letters were written.

*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I once received: **that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*** (1 Cor. 15:3-5 ESV).

In these verses, Paul says that the message he delivered to the Corinthian ecclesia was the same message he himself had previously received. We might wonder who explained to Paul that Jesus' death and resurrection were predicted in the Jewish Scriptures. The answer may be found in Paul's letter to the Galatians, describing the events following his conversion on the Road to Damascus. Wondering if his experience with Jesus was real, Paul says he went to Jerusalem and sought out Peter and James—two individuals who were specifically referenced to have personally seen Jesus alive.

The NET Bible records it this way,

I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and get information from him... I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. (Gal 1:18-19 NET).

The Christian belief in the resurrection is not a fable that developed over time but was a fundamental core belief from the beginning.

Amazingly, this fact-finding trip occurred three to five years after our Lord's crucifixion and is likely the source of the "doctrine of first importance" he shared with the Corinthians. Based on Paul's corroboration with other first-hand eyewitnesses, he confidently asserted, "If Christ has not been

raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith."

The Christian belief in the resurrection is not a fable that developed over time but was a fundamental core belief from the beginning.

Eyewitness Testimony

While Paul sought out Peter and James to hear their eyewitness testimony before fully committing his life to preach the Gospel, they were not the only eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection. The Bible records more than ten instances when Jesus showed himself alive to individuals and groups of people. Jesus appeared first-hand to hundreds, "most of whom are still alive," wrote Paul as if to challenge any doubters to seek out these witnesses as he himself had done.

The fact that the Bible does not gloss over expressions of doubt **lends credibility to the account of the resurrection.**

The Gospel writers record Jesus being seen by Mary Magdalene, the women returning from the tomb, Peter, the two men on the road to Emmaus, along with the disciples on multiple occasions. Speaking about Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, Bro. Simon Dean wrote,

Jesus was seen not once, but many times; not by one person, but by several; not only by individuals, but also by groups; not at one location, but at many; not by believers only, but by skeptics and unbelievers as well.¹²

The testimony of these first-hand witnesses was that Jesus' appearances were real. They were not simply visions or hallucinations. Luke records that not only did Jesus appear to them, but he *"gave many convincing proofs that he was alive."* (Acts 1:3 NIV). Jesus touched people and had them touch him and inspect his wounds. Jesus ate with them and even left evidence of the occasion by leaving leftover fish and loaves half-eaten. This was no figment of their imagination.

Principle of Embarrassment

And while Jesus appeared in person and provided many convincing proofs that he was alive, not all believed. Matthew recorded one such occasion when Jesus appeared on a mountain, *"but some doubted."* (Matt 28:17 ESV). Being skeptical of miracles and especially of the resurrection of the dead is normal,

and that's why it's not surprising to read of Thomas' skepticism. (John 20:27) The fact that the Bible does not gloss over expressions of doubt lends credibility to the account of the resurrection. Ancient texts are often analyzed by scholars and historians using a type of analysis called the criterion of embarrassment. This principle can validate historical texts for trustworthiness, authenticity, and truthfulness. Texts that soften embarrassing, shameful, or disturbing details can lead scholars to conclude that the author was more concerned with reputation than accuracy. The Bible's account of the death and resurrection of Jesus includes many examples of embarrassing and shameful details. The fact that Jesus, the supposed Messiah, was executed in the most shameful manner known to the ancient world is just one example. The fact that women (who had no legal standing as witnesses in courts of law)¹³ discovered the empty tomb is another. Academics assume that if the account of Jesus were fabricated, the Gospel writers would have gone out of their way to exclude details like Peter denying, Thomas doubting, or the disciples despairing when Jesus did not become king.

Changed Lives

Before the resurrection appearances, Jesus' disciples were afraid. Matthew records that when Jesus was arrested by a large crowd carrying swords and

clubs in Gethsemane, *“all the disciples deserted him and fled.”* (Matt. 26:56 NIV). Then, during his trial before Caiaphas, Peter, who surreptitiously followed Jesus to the court of the Sanhedrin, denied even knowing Jesus when he was identified as a possible co-conspirator. And John records that on the day of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, the disciples were hiding behind locked doors *“for fear of the Jewish leaders.”* (John 20:19 NIV).

Then, something changed. Men who once cowered in fear became courageous and spoke boldly about Jesus and his resurrection. In doing so, they willingly risked prison and persecution. The only thing that could account for this change in attitude and behavior is that these men were convinced they had seen Jesus alive and brought back from the dead. Jesus’ resurrection gave them hope and assured them they, too, would be raised to life after their death, just like Jesus. Paul wrote, *“If we have been united with him in death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his... Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”* (Rom 6:5, 8 NIV).

After his resurrection, Jesus sought out Peter and rebuilt his confidence following the shattering experience

of denying his Lord. Peter seems to refer to this in his first letter when he writes, *“In [God’s] great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.”* (1 Pet 1:3,4 NIV). With Peter’s renewed confidence, having both seen the risen Christ and being assured of his inheritance, Peter found himself again before Caiaphas. This time, instead of fearfully witnessing the trial of Jesus from the shadows, Peter stood on trial. It was his second chance, and he spoke boldly and with great courage.

Perhaps the greatest example of the resurrection effect comes from the life of Saul of Tarsus. The Acts of the Apostles describe him as a prestigious Jew who once hunted Christians to kill them or throw them in prison. He was the greatest persecutor and threat to the early community of believers. But then, after he experienced Jesus on the road to Damascus and heard the testimony of other witnesses, Saul became Paul the Apostle. He gave up everything that had previously been important to him. The only possible explanation is that he, too, was convinced of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus and the power of his resurrection. (Phil 3:7-11).

...instead of fearfully witnessing the trial of Jesus from the shadows, Peter stood on trial. It was his second chance, and **he spoke boldly and with great courage.**

Concluding Thoughts

Following Jesus' death by crucifixion, Jesus' followers claimed to have seen him alive. Eyewitnesses describe him walking among the people for forty days before ascending to heaven. During that time, Jesus performed many convincing acts that proved to his despondent disciples and ardent adversaries alike that he had been raised from the dead and was alive forevermore. They were so convinced of this fact that they devoted their lives

to spreading the gospel message despite real threats to their lives and livelihood. The early result of their work is that the Christian community began to grow exponentially. Why? Because, like us, men and women of faith concluded, "*It is true! The Lord has risen!*" (Luke 24:34 NIV).

Steve Davis,
Boston Ecclesia, MA

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Thoughts on the Way

"John's Gospel is Hard"

On hearing [Jesus], many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" (John 6:60).¹

THE Gospel of John is the most "spiritual" of the gospels. The first three gospels tell us what Jesus did and what he said, but the last gospel is different. It moves beyond the obvious facts of Jesus's life and ventures into deeper, more profound meanings. In contrast to the others, John offers a unique portrait of Christ cherished by believers through the ages. It is this spiritual character of John's gospel that is the foundation of its authority and distinguishes it from the others in style and in content.

John concentrates on Jesus and what he taught in private—most likely explaining matters to John himself, who may have been Jesus's cousin and the youngest of the Twelve. There are several reasons for this:

1. In his gospel account, John says that he ran faster than Peter when they both hurried to the tomb of Jesus (John 20:4), implying that John was the younger of the two.
2. John was the brother of James, the son of Zebedee (Matt 4:21), and the two are always mentioned in the same order, first James and then

John, as though James were the older of the two.

3. Like a younger brother, John seems to have had a special relationship with Jesus. This may be because Salome, the wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John, was a sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus (Matt 27:56, Mark 15:40, John 19:25).
4. This may account for a special closeness between the two and a good reason why Jesus took his younger cousin under his wing.
5. This explains why the other disciples never seemed jealous of this friendship. Indeed, most, if not all, might have looked upon John as their younger brother, too—so how could they hold it against their Master if he did the same?

All this may explain how John's gospel was the most spiritually profound and insightful of all the four. The other three gospels are straightforward—giving just the facts, we might say—but John's gospel shows Jesus as a real human being, not an icon.

John writes with a simple vocabulary, but his words are charged with symbolism. Words like believe, love, truth, world, light, darkness, name, witness, sin, judgment, life, glory, bread, and water... are the keywords of this gospel. They are simple words, but our task is to discern the extraordinary in the simplicity.

John's gospel contains a clear statement of purpose:

These [signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name (John 20:31 NKJV).

As John sees it, and writes it, the sole purpose of life is to know the Father and to experience life eternal through faith in the Son. John sees the Son sent from his Father above, with the mission to glorify the Father (John 17:1) through his suffering on the cross (John 12:23; 13:1).

In the first chapter, John introduces Jesus by seven key titles, a perfect echo to the Book of Revelation: Jesus is "*the Word*," "*the Lamb of God*," "*Rabbi*," "*the Messiah*," "*the king of Israel*," "*the Son of God*," and "*the Son of Man*," Every title is another golden thread to lead the reader through the whole of the Gospel.

The gospels have been arranged in their current order—for a purpose:

1. Matthew comes first, with numerous references to the Old

Testament. In Matthew, we find the characteristic phrase: "*that it might be fulfilled as was spoken in the prophets*." **Matthew is the "bridge" between the Old and the New Testaments.** It was specially written for the Jews, who were well versed in the Old Testament, as if to say: "Here's the next logical step... Jesus Christ!"

2. Mark is the briefest of the four Gospels, probably written first (according to many scholars, anyway). In Mark, Jesus is a simple man of action, a servant who is always **doing something to help others**—performing miracles, healing the lame, blessing children, and cleansing lepers while standing up to the leaders of Israel. Mark's

gospel has very little emphasis on what Jesus said—and much more on what he did!

3. Luke was a Gentile (some think he was a Samaritan), and **he wrote a gospel that is especially attuned to the needs of Gentiles.** Many of Christ's encounters with Gentiles are reported by Luke. Luke was a companion of the Apostle Paul and spent much time with him, preaching the gospel to Gentiles. Certain commentators have suggested that the Gospel of Luke might have been intended as a legal brief prepared by Luke to present to the Roman authorities on behalf of Paul and the Christian cause. This could explain, from one point of

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view, the abundance of references to Gentiles, as if Luke (and Paul) wanted everyone to know that this "new religion" was not exclusively for Jews but for Gentiles also.

And then comes John, most likely written later and evidently written to supplement the other gospels by filling in some gaps here and there. John reports many actions and sayings of Jesus and many discourses of Jesus reported by John, which are not mentioned in the other three gospels.

The Jews who heard Jesus speak said, "*This is a hard teaching.*" They were right. Today, we may hear this same "complaint" from some who read John's gospel. Let me suggest this: **John's Gospel is not supposed to be easy.** Instead, it is intended to be read as a challenging, uplifting, awe-inspiring "heaven's eye view" of the good news **after** mastering the other three gospels.

For example, Matthew and Luke tell us about the birth of Jesus in an ordinary, straightforward (although miracle-filled) factual story. An angel appears to a young, engaged woman, and she conceives a child by the power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, Jesus is born (the Son of God Himself, and the son of Mary)—a small wisp of life in the womb, then a fully formed baby, a

child, and finally a young man. An extraordinary human being with the stamp of divinity upon him, a prophet and more than a prophet, the Messiah, the anointed one of God. But still, for all this, a human being born and living among other human beings—tempted in all points like his fellows.

And then comes John, who summarizes the other accounts in a very few words:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... and the Word was made flesh. (John 1:1, 14).

Extravagant, heavenly language. The language of eternity, but also

true. Matthew, Mark, and Luke give us the facts. Then John helps us to soar into the heavenly places. All in all, it's a good combination.

*George Booker,
Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX*

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THE CHRISTADELPHIAN
TIDINGS
OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

is published monthly, except bimonthly in July-August, by The **Christadelphian Tidings**.

567 Astorian Drive, Simi Valley, CA 93065-5941.

FIRST CLASS POSTAGE PAID at Simi Valley, CA and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Christadelphian Tidings, 567 Astorian Dr., Simi Valley, CA 93065.

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